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THE CHARACTERS

Floria Tosca, a celebrated singer (soprano)
Mario Cavaradossi, a painter (tenor)
Baron Scarpia, Chief of Police (baritone)
A Sacristan (bass)
Spoletta, a police agent (tenor)
Sciarrone, a gendarme (bass)
A Galoer (bass)
A Shepherd-boy (alto)
Roberti, the executioner (silent role)

THE STORY

Tosca is a melodrama in three acts with a libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, after Victorien Sardou’s play La Tosca. Named for a singer around whom the events of the opera proceed, Tosca tells the tale of an escaped prisoner, doomed lovers, and a jealous Chief of Police.

ACT I

The opera begins with Angelotti, who has just escaped from prison, hiding in the large church in Rome. Cavaradossi arrives to finish his portrait of the Magdalen, which is influenced by the likeness of his beloved Tosca and another woman he has seen in prayer at church. A Sacristan complains of Cavaradossi. Angelotti emerges from hiding and explains to Cavaradossi that he has escaped from the Castel Sant’Angelo, where he had been imprisoned by the order of the Baron Scarpia.

Tosca’s voice is heard and Angelotti returns to hiding. Tosca enters and tells of her jealousy of Marchesa Attavanti (Angelotti’s sister). She suspects that her lover Cavaradossi harbors secret affections for Marchesa Attavanti. Despite her
jealousy, Tosca agrees to meet Cavaradossi at his villa after her performance that evening.

Tosca leaves. While Cavaradossi and Angelotti plot Angelotti’s escape, they hear a cannon shot from the Castel Sant’Angelo, which indicates that Angelotti’s flight has been discovered. At the same time, the Sacristan returns with the (ultimately false) news that Napoleon has been defeated at Marengo and there is a celebration in the church. Scarpia appears with his agents, searching for Angelotti. Suspicion falls on Cavaradossi after Scarpia finds clues that Angelotti has been in the chapel. Tosca returns and Scarpia arouses further jealousy in her by insisting one of the clues—a fan found in the chapel—belongs to Marchesa Attavanti. After Tosca leaves suddenly, Scarpia orders that she should be followed. He gloats of the possibility that he could capture the fugitive and win the favors of Tosca.

ACT 2

Act 2 beings in Scarpia’s apartment where he eats alone while Queen Carolina entertains downstairs. Cavaradossi has been arrested and is interrogated. Tosca, who had been singing for the Queen, enters while Cavaradossi is being tortured in the next room. Tosca refuses to tell of Angelotti’s whereabouts but the sounds of Cavaradossi being tortured cause her to give away Angelotti’s hiding place in a garden well. Scarpia stops the torture and Sciarrone enters with the news that the Battle of Marengo had been won by Napoleon.

Scarpia declares that Cavaradossi is to be shot at dawn, but he offers to release Cavaradossi if Tosca will give in to his demands. Spoletta then enters with the news that Angelotti has killed himself. Tosca accepts Scarpia’s terms and he decides that Cavaradossi will be given a mock execution. Tosca asserts that Scarpia write her and Cavaradossi a safe-conduct. Just as he finishes doing so, Tosca stabs him and flees.

ACT 3

At the Castel Sant’Angelo, Cavaradossi prepares to die. Tosca enters and explains that there will be a mock-execution, after which they can escape together. However, Scarpia has his revenge posthumously, as his orders did not insure a mock execution and Cavaradossi is shot. Meanwhile, the news of Scarpia’s murder has reached Spoletta, Sciarrone, and other police. They call for Tosca’s blood. Tosca climbs on to the battlements, and crying that she and Scarpia will meet before God, leaps to her death.
“Puccini was a great master, not because he wrote unusual chords--anybody can do that--but because he used them with such extraordinary theatrical artistry and imagination.” – Kurt Weill

GIACOMO PUCCINI, whose full name is Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini, was born on December 22, 1858 in Lucca, Tuscany (Italy) and died on November 29, 1924 in Brussels, Belgium. Puccini is considered by many to be the last composer of Italian Romantic opera. In addition to Tosca (1900), he is also known for La Bohème (1896), Madama Butterfly (1904), and Turandot, which was left uncomplete.

Puccini was the descendant of two generations of musical directors of the Cathedral of San Martino in Lucca. He was brought into music as an early age, with the expectation that he would take over the family business. Puccini was orphaned at the age of five after the death of his father. The municipality of Lucca continued to support Puccini through a small pension, until he came of age and could take over as the cathedral organist.

In 1876, Puccini witnessed a performance of Verdi’s Aida in the city of Pisa. Aida convinced him that his true vocation should be opera and in 1880 he went to study music at the Milan Conservatory. He received his diploma in 1883 and his first opera, a one act production titled Le villi was premiered in Milan on May 31, 1884. The music publisher Giulio Ricordi was impressed by the opera and encouraged him to add two more acts. Ricordi also commissioned Puccini to write a new opera for the infamous venue, La Scala.

His 1889 opera, Edgar, was a failure but Puccini continued to compose. His Manon Lescaut (1893), though not tremendously successful, alludes to many characteristics of
his mature operas, particularly in the care and attention he gave to the characters. His mature operas are *La Bohéme* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), *Madame Butterfly* (1904), and *La fanciulla del west* (1910, *Girl of the Golden West*).

Puccini’s later operas, like the three stylistically distinct one-act operas that comprise *Il trittico* (1918, *The Triptych*) demonstrate a more contemporary influence than his Romantic mature operas. *Il trittico* is comprised of *Il tabarro* (The Cloak), *Sour Angelica*, and *Gianni Schicchi*. His last opera was based on the tale of *Turandot*, as it is told in dramatist Carlo Gozzi’s play. It was his only Impressionist opera. However, Puccini was unable to complete the final duet of the opera. He died after throat surgery in 1924.

**THE LIBRETTISTS & THE PLAYWRIGHT**

(*Left to right*) Puccini, Giacosa, Illica

**LUIGI ILLICA (1857-1919)**

LUIGI ILLICA was an Italian librettist who wrote for Puccini, Pietro Mascagni, Alfredo Catalani, Umberto Giordano, Baron Alberto Franchetti, among others. He is best known for *La Bohème, Tosca, Madama Butterfly*, and *Andrea Chénier*. Illica was born at Castell’Arquato. When working with Giacosa, Illica would supply the plot and dialogue.

**GIUSEPPE GIACOSA (1847 – 1906)**

GIUSEPPE GIACOSA was an Italian poet, playwright, and librettist. He is known for his work on Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut, La Bohème, Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*. When working with Illica, Giacosa would polish the libretto into verses.
VICTORIEN SARDOU (1831 – 1908)

VICTORIEN SARDOU was a French dramatist who is credited for his role in developing nineteenth-century theatre’s popular dramatic genre, the “well-made play.” However, Sardou wrote in many styles; his first play, Les Pattes de mouche (1860) was a comedy. Sardou’s La Tosca was used as the basis for Giacosa’s and Illica’s libretto. As a play, La Tosca was wildly successful and was performed over 3,000 times. Puccini witnessed one of these performances and fell in love with the production. He then decided to adapt it for the operatic stage. However, Sardou had already granted the rights to Puccini’s rival, Alberto Franchetti; it is for this reason that Sardou sued Illica and Giacosa for plagiarism. The lawsuit lasted until one month before Sardou’s death, when Sardou was declared as the winner of the case. However, Franchetti abandoned the project after being convinced that the opera would fail.
What should opera look like in a world marked by rapid industrial and technological development? Though such questions certainly resonate in the twenty-first century, opera composers were asking the same questions at precisely the moment Puccini’s Tosca was born.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the broader world was undergoing a massive amount of social, cultural, technological, and political change. It saw the rise of modern industrial states and urban politics, increasing scientific progress, and the crest of European power with its colonialism, empire-building, and imperialism. Concurrently there was a radical desacralization of sacred spaces, a rise of secularism, and a collapse of metaphysical claims. Modern technologies surged as well with the invention of the telephone (1876), phonograph (1877), lightbulb (1878), gas-powered automobile (1885), zinc-carbon battery (1886), zipper (1891), diesel engine (1893), and cinema (1895). Overall there was a self-conscious concern with being “modern,” a watch-word of the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Such was the world in which Puccini’s generation grew up. Artists and composers who came of age at the turn of the century bore the responsibility of creating artistic responses to this rapidly changing world. One can imagine them asking, “As a musician, how can I address this emerging world of science, realism, and technology, while still holding onto art as something that moves the soul? How do I find new, truer, bolder things to say? How can I develop music in ways that outflank my predecessors but still use the same basic musical language?” A dilemma indeed.

Puccini was among a group of young Italian opera composers whose response to the emerging sense of modernity involved turning to verismo—Italian for “realism.”
Influenced by French literary circles, the Italian *verismo* movement considered the real world worth representing. *Verismo* composers gave their artistic interpretation of things that someone might actually experience. As such, *verismo* operas presented audiences enough details of the real world to feel more authentic or scientifically true than the artistic work of previous generations. They could be set in any time or place, be it 1850s rural Sicily, present day Japan, or—as with *Tosca*—Rome in 1800, truthfully recreating that reality, wherever and whenever it existed.

Puccini composed *Tosca* squarely within the *verismo* tradition. The opera premiered at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome on 14 January 1900, with the choice of the Italian capital for the premiere presumably inspired by the Roman setting. The libretto was by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, Puccini’s collaborators for both *La bohème* and *Madama Butterfly*. It was based on Victorien Sardou’s 1887 five-act play *La Tosca*, which was set in the days following Napoleon’s victory at the Battle of Marengo in June 1800 and featured acclaimed actress Sarah Bernhardt in the title role. Though one of Sardou’s most successful works, the play is rarely performed today, its popularity outshone by Puccini’s opera. Puccini drastically shortened the original drama, reducing the number of characters and focusing on the interpersonal drama between celebrated Tosca, Cavaradossi, and Scarpia rather than on political motivations or historical background. *Tosca* also features three of Puccini’s best-known arias: “Recondita armonia,” “Vissi d’arte,” and “E lucean le stelle.”

A variety of *Tosca*’s elements lend themselves to heightened realism. The plot dramatizes a moment in Italian history when Rome was alternately under Napoleonic and Neapolitan occupation, and featured actual Roman locations—the church of Sant’Andrea della Valle, the Palazzo Farnese, and the Castel Sant’Angelo. The libretto uses ordinary speech and a relaxed metric structure instead of the tightly organized poetic texts typical of earlier Italian operas. Moreover, the shepherd boy’s song at opening of Act III features local Romanesco dialect.

Musically, Puccini recreated a realistic Roman soundscape through the use of bells, real melodies, and diegetic song. He asked a priest about the *Te Deum* melody used in Roman churches, the correct order of the cardinal’s procession, and Swiss guard’s costumes. Puccini even learned the exact pitch of the great bell of St. Peter’s and made a special journey to Rome to hear the matins bells from the ramparts of the Castel Sant’Angelo.

*Tosca*’s structure also aligns with *verismo* ideals. Until the mid-nineteenth century, operas typically consisted of discrete blocks—arias, duets, choruses, and so forth. For the *veristi*, however, an externally imposed structure was artificial. Instead of opening with a grand instrumental delivery of the aria’s memorable tune, *Tosca*’s arias often start simply and without pomp, so the audience might not even realize an aria has begun until a sudden burst of lyricism arrives.

In true *verismo* style, *Tosca* also depicts torture, attempted rape, murder, and suicide—uncommon subjects for earlier operas. Puccini’s treatment of Cavaradossi’s torture shocked audiences, who would have preferred being told about it rather actually hearing the tenor’s off-stage screams. The execution scene proved even more unsettling. Though in Sardou’s play it
took place off-stage, Puccini made the scene more explicit, with both victim and firing squad in full view on stage.

Like verismo opera, early cinema also shared a broader interest in realism. The earliest films were exhibitionist in nature, emphasizing effect, spectacle, and technological novelty and offering viewers the opportunity to “really see,” seemingly without mediation. Famously, audiences found the Lumière brothers’ silent film of the arrival of a train so realistic that they screamed and ran from the room to get out of the way of the on-coming train—despite the fact that it was only on the screen. Tosca’s shocking elements can thus be seen in connection to early cinema’s shocking immediacy and realism. Moreover, both Tosca and early Italian cinema engaged with a broader cultural interest in encountering the past, experiencing it as realistically as possible. As cinema turned increasingly toward narrative subjects in the decade after Tosca’s premiere, the burgeoning Italian film industry became known for its historical and epic films.

Though Tosca was an immediate public success, with Puccini describing the premiere as “a veritable triumph... Italian-style with shouts and calls for encores,” its early critical reception was mixed, largely due to its veristic nature. A reviewer in the Mercure de France called it “coarsely puerile, pretentious and vapid,” while a Le Figaro critic disparaged its “disconcerting vulgarities.” Critics were shocked because they were unaccustomed to a heightened level of objectivity in a genre they expected to be fictional and subjective. The stage—and especially opera—was not a place to see reality, but to see fiction. Yet in combining art and reality, Puccini produced a verismo opera that has both shocked and enchanted audiences for generations.
NAPOLEON AND THE BATTLE OF MARENGO

The drama in Tosca occurs alongside a nonfictional battle that was itself incredibly dramatic. The events of the Battle of Marengo are riddled with unexpected outcomes and surprises that lend additional drama to the already exciting plot. The Battle of Marengo was the victory that sealed the success of Napoleon Bonaparte’s Italian Campaign of 1800. In October 1799, Napoleon returned from Egypt, having experienced one of the worst defeats of his career. In France, Napoleon was able to take advantage of the confused state of French politics and seize power. By December of 1799, he had named himself First Consul.

Napoleon then turned his attention to Italy, leading an army over the Swiss Alps to attack the Austrians. Meanwhile, French forces also marched into southern Germany. By mid-May 1800, Napoleon crossed the Italian Alps with his Army of the Reserve. Although he had 40,000 men, they only had six guns. The initial march allowed them to successfully threaten Austrian lines of communication in Northern Italy.

On June 2, the French Army seized Milan and successfully cut off the Austrian supply route. Napoleon thought that this might distract the Austrian troops, many of whom were already occupied at the Siege of Genoa. However, Genoa surrendered on June 4, freeing up many Austrian troops who could then fight against the French further north.

Napoleon won the battle of Montebello on June 9, giving him confidence that the Austrians would retreat. Instead, the Austrians were waiting to conduct an assault on Napoleon’s troops. They caught the French by surprise, forcing them to retreat to a new position at St. Guiliano Vecchio. Several French counterattacks failed and it seemed as if the Austrians would be victorious. However, unknown to the Austrians, French reinforcements were beginning to arrive and the French closed on the Austrians. The French were able to force the Austrians back into Alessandria. The Austrians sustained heavy losses and were forced into an armistice with the French.

Tosca is directly tied to the events of the Battle of Marengo because the opera takes place during the brief time when the news of the battle was reaching Rome. During Act One, the Sacristan announces the Austrian victory. Celebrations began to take place like the one that hosted by Queen Carolina. However, the Austrian success in the battle was short-lived and Napoleon ultimately wins. The French victory was disappointing for the Queen and Scarpia, but for Bonapartists like Cavaradossi and Angelotti, the surprise victory seems to give them posthumous revenge.
FUN FACTS

1. Although Tosca is supposed to be a beloved opera singer, women were not allowed on the opera stage in Rome from the 1600s until 1798. Until this time, the roles of women were played by castroti (or musici). That means that Tosca would have only had about two years to grow to fame!

2. Tosca was given her name by Sardou after the church of Saint Tosca in Verona, Italy.

3. Cavaradossi was not Italian. According to Sardou, he was born in Paris and his first visit to Rome was not until 1800. Sardou also intended for Cavaradossi to sound similar to the famous painter, Cavaraggio, and to the Neapolitan (from the city of Naples) admiral Caracciolo who was executed in 1798.

4. There actually is a “hiding place” in a chapel at Sant’Andrea della Valle.

5. Rome was occupied by Austrians, Russians, Turks, Neapolitans, and English at the time when Tosca was set. They were all at war with Republican France.

6. The news of Napoleon’s victory really did reach Rome like we see in Tosca. Multiple couriers arrived in the city first with news of Napoleon’s defeat, then with news of his victory.

7. The librettists Giacosa and Illica originally included a scene, where Tosca goes mad while holding the dead Cavaradossi in her hands. She imagines that the two are on a gondola. However, Sardou opposed to this ending and Puccini agreed. The librettists had to rework the ending in order for it to be more faithful to Sardou’s original work.

8. The music from the tenor’s brief aria in the third act was actually originally from Puccini’s Edgar (1889). The music had been cut from Edgar so Puccini simply recycled it in Tosca.

9. Tosca received mixed reviews when it was premiered. Critics asserted that the subject of the opera was too strong for Puccini, who they believed should stick to sentimental topics.
FURTHER READING

For Adult Readers

**Scarpia** by Piers Paul Read
This work of fiction tells the story of the Baron Scarpia before he meets Tosca in Venice. Steeped in factual detail and exploring the lives—part historical, part fictional—of figures from Puccini's famous opera, Scarpia shines a light into dusty corridors of history and dark corners of the human soul.

**Tosca's Rome: The Play and the Opera in Historical Perspective** by Susan Vandiver Nicassio
A timeless tale of love, lust, and politics, *Tosca* is one of the most popular operas ever written. In *Tosca's Rome*, Susan Vandiver Nicassio explores the surprising historical realities that lie behind Giacomo Puccini's opera and the play by Victorien Sardou on which it is based.

**Tosca** by Victorien Sardou. Commentary by W. Laird Kleine-Ahlbrandt
A translation of *La Tosca*, the play that inspired the Puccini opera, complete with annotations and critical comments. This work seeks to give a well-rounded picture of Sardou as a playwright who imbued his pieces with a wealth of historical knowledge.

**Puccini** by Julian Budden
Blending astute musical analysis with a colorful account of Puccini's life, this is an illuminating look at some of the most popular operas in the repertoire, including *Manon Lescaut, La Boheme, Tosca, Madama Butterfly*, and *Turandot*. Budden provides a look at the process of putting an opera together, the cut-and-slash of nineteenth-century Italian opera. Budden provides an informative analysis of the operas themselves, examining the music act by act.

**Tosca's Prism: Three Moments of Western Cultural History** by Deborah Burton, Susan Vandiver Nicassio, and Agostino Ziino
In this collection, distinguished musicologists, historians, theater professionals, and luminaries of the operatic stage reflect on three diverse moments of European history—1800, 1900, 2000—through the refracting prism of Puccini’s *Tosca*, providing multidimensional images of each period from a wide range of perspectives.
AN INTRODUCTION

Michigan Opera Theatre (MOT), the state of Michigan’s premier opera company, which, through its commitment to producing and presenting the very best professional productions of opera, dance, musical theater, and arts education programming, serves as a statewide cultural resource.

The vision of Founder and Artistic Director Dr. David DiChiera, and led by President and Chief Executive Officer Wayne S. Brown, MOT offers an essential, vibrant contribution to the quality of life for Detroit-area residents and to communities throughout the region. This dynamic cultural resource exemplifies artistic excellence. Since its founding in 1971, MOT has offered southeast Michigan the finest arts and cultural performances, concerts, education, and entertainment. By presenting culturally significant productions relative to the diverse populace of the region, such as Porgy and Bess, Anoush, King Roger, Dead Man Walking, and the world premiere production of Margaret Garner, MOT has brought the magic of live theatre to thousands of people.

In April of 1996, on the Company’s twenty-fifth anniversary, the ribbon was cut for the grand opening of the Detroit Opera House. Michigan Opera Theatre joined the ranks of major opera companies worldwide with the multi-million renovation of a 1922 movie palace. Michigan Opera Theatre is one of only a few opera companies in the United States to own its own opera house. The product of Dr. DiChiera’s dream, the Detroit Opera House is comparable to the world’s greatest houses in visual and acoustical beauty.

OUR MISSION

Michigan Opera Theatre is the premier multi-disciplined producer and presenter for opera, musical theatre, and dance in the Great Lakes Region. Based in the city of Detroit, the organization engages artists of national and international stature for stellar main stage and outreach performances, and provides compelling cultural enrichment programs for the diverse audiences and communities that it serves, making it one of Detroit’s pillars of arts and culture.

SELECT AWARDS & HONORS INCLUDE

Best Opera: Cyrano, Wilde Awards 2017 | Best Opera: The Passenger, Wilde Awards 2016 | Best Opera, Elektra, Wilde Awards, 2015 | Founder and Artistic Director Dr. David DiChiera named the 2013 Kresge Eminent Artist | Opera Honors Award to Dr. David DiChiera, National Endowment for the Arts, 2010 | Outstanding Service in the Field of Opera for Youth, National Opera Society, 2006 | Success in Education Award, Opera America, 2002
The Department of Education and Community Programs has brought its varied musical programs to every age group in Michigan for nearly 40 years. Artists visit schools, community centers, and stages throughout Michigan, performing shows that range from lively children’s operas to musical revues. Founded by Karen V. DiChiera, the Department of Education and Community Programs serves the entire state with quality entertainment and education.

Since its inception, the Department of Education and Community Programs has been honored with awards and recognitions including the Governor’s Arts Award, a Spirit of Detroit Award, and multiple Philo T. Farnsworth Awards for Excellence in Community Programming, among others. Touring productions, concerts, workshops, and residencies have reached many thousands of people throughout the state of Michigan, and programs have extended as far as Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and Canada. With an ever-growing repertoire of productions, an exciting roster of up-and-coming singers, and a circle of experienced and passionate teaching artists, the Department of Education and Community Programs continues to provide people of all ages with opportunities for access, growth, and learning through the arts.
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Sources

Oxford Music Online
www.oxfordmusiconline.com

Opera Wire
www.operawire.com

American Center for Puccini Studies
www.pucciniamerica.org


Christy Thomas

Christy Thomas received her Ph.D. with distinction from Yale University. As a music historian with a background in both art history and history, she incorporates interdisciplinary materials and approaches in her teaching and her research to complement the study of notated and recorded music with a myriad of sources that contribute to the broader networks in which music exists. In her research, she considers the evolving responses of the Italian opera industry to the emerging media technologies from the 1890s through the first decades of the twentieth century, focusing particularly on Casa Ricordi, the foremost Italian music publisher of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ultimately, Professor Thomas’s research revises the prevailing understanding of the relationship between opera and media technologies within larger cultural frameworks. By offering an alternative to current constructions of their historical relationship, her research reshapes the discourse on the historical and contemporary...
connections between opera and media technologies, and is thus of transdisciplinary relevance for musicologists, film historians, cultural historians, and media and performance scholars.

Professor Thomas has published in The Opera Quarterly and is working on a book project tentatively entitled Operatic Encounters with New Media: Sound Recording and Silent Cinema that will serve as a broad and systematic study of historical operatic encounters with emerging technological media in the first decades of the twentieth century. Her broad research interests include the history and theory of opera, reception studies, cultural history, and the theoretical and conceptual issues of performance and mediation. A classically trained singer, she also sings with Opera Maine and the Oratorio Chorale.

In her teaching, Professor Thomas uses music history and theory to teach the transferrable skills foundational to a liberal arts education. She also looks for ways to connect the subject matter in her courses with other departments and disciplines such as history, art history, languages, theater and dance, cinema studies, and gender, sexuality, and women’s studies. She has taught courses on opera and gender, the historical intersections between music and technology, and the interplay between music and drama in operas and musicals, as well as historical surveys of Western classical music, introductory music theory, and tonal analysis.